

DCS INTERNAL AFFAIRS INVESTIGATION COMPLETE

Nashville- DCS Commissioner Viola Miller today released several findings from the DCS Internal Affairs investigation of the Department's alleged mishandling of a child abuse investigation on June 24, 2004, in Campbell County involving three-year-old Haley Spicer.

"First of all, I am grateful Haley Spicer is now safe and DCS can focus on her well-being," said Commissioner Miller. "It is unfortunate that such an incident had to occur to bring these problems to light."

The internal investigation, which was completed July 9, concludes that DCS staff did not properly respond to reports of abuse involving Haley. Examples cited in the report include failure to assign an alleged abuse referral dated April 26, 2004, for investigation by a team leader; a DCS case manager did not properly forward information to a CPS investigator on June 16, 2004, regarding alleged abuse of Haley; and a supervisor failed to instruct the CPS investigator to report to the hospital until several hours after the child arrived for medical treatment.

Technical problems with pagers were noted, as CPS investigators periodically did not receive pages when on call. The report cites that regional management was aware of this ongoing problem and failed to develop a plan to insure that DCS staff were available to receive reports alleging child abuse or neglect.

"After reviewing the results of the internal investigation, I have taken disciplinary action against those individuals who failed to do their job and clearly violated departmental policy and procedures," said Commissioner Miller. "I will not tolerate a child's safety being jeopardized by the failed actions of any DCS employee."

Disciplinary actions taken included the demotion of a Team Leader to a non-supervisory Case Manager position, along with a twenty-day suspension. Additional disciplinary action included a three-day suspension for a case manager for failing to properly contact a child protective services worker, which placed a child at risk of harm. A third employee received a letter of written warning. The retirement of a former administrator has already resulted in a leadership change for the DCS East region.

Commissioner Miller said this internal review has uncovered issues that are being addressed immediately, such as evaluating equipment and communications services to ensure case managers have the ability to receive pages and adequate phone coverage in rural areas. Also being addressed is the implementation of Central Intake in the East region with a target date of utilizing this system by August 15, 2004, to receive information on suspected child abuse and neglect. Central Intake is a toll-free number to report child abuse 24 hours a day and is presently activated in five of the 12 DCS regions. The projected date for implementing this intake system statewide is March 2005.

In June 2004, Haley suffered from bruises and burns to her arms, legs, eyes and buttocks and is presently in DCS custody. She is placed with a half-sibling in a foster home and has made great strides in her recovery.

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